

# Theodore the Studite and Photius on the Humanity of Christ

## *A Neglected Byzantine Discussion on Universals in the Time of Iconoclasm*

CHRISTOPHE ERISMANN

The problem of universals is among the central topics in discussions of logic and ontology in the late ancient and early medieval philosophical tradition. Porphyry's question regarding the ontological nature of genera (such as *animal*) and species (such as *cat* or *tortoise*), posed at the beginning of the *Isagoge*, his introduction to the *Categories*, gave birth to intense exegetical activity on this topic. Regarding genera and species, Porphyry asks successively whether they subsist (ὑφέστηκεν) or whether they actually depend on bare thoughts alone (ἐν μόναις ψιλαῖς ἐπινοίαις); if they actually subsist whether they are bodies or incorporeal; and finally whether they are separate (χωριστά) or are in sensible individuals (ἐν τοῖς αἰσθητοῖς) and subsist about (περὶ) them.<sup>1</sup> Determining whether universals have any kind of extramental existence or are only conceptual; as well as deciding between the Aristotelian approach, according to which universals can subsist only if they are instantiated in individuals, and the Platonic approach, which postulates their existence independent of any realization in particulars, were all but a mandatory agenda for every serious philosopher of the time

who dared to propose an analysis of (sensible) reality. Byzantine philosophers—especially during the eleventh century and the first quarter of the twelfth with authors like John Italos and Eustratios of Nicaea—offer valuable contributions to this debate.<sup>2</sup>

Parallel to the philosophical debates and nourished by them, there is a theological tradition for the problem of universals, which mobilizes the same kinds of fundamental alternatives. The status of universal entities was discussed, within the framework of dogmatic Christian positions, with vocabulary, concepts, and most importantly ontological theses that originate in the philosophical tradition. Some discussions in Trinitarian theology (of which John Philoponus is the most striking example<sup>3</sup>) are a good illustration of this.

1 Porphyry, *Isagoge*, ed. A. Busse 1.9–14: αὐτίκα περὶ τῶν γενῶν τε καὶ εἰδῶν τὸ μὲν εἶτε ὑφέστηκεν εἶτε καὶ ἐν μόναις ψιλαῖς ἐπινοίαις κεῖται εἶτε καὶ ὑφεστηκότα σώματά ἐστιν ἢ σώματα καὶ πότερον χωριστά ἢ ἐν τοῖς αἰσθητοῖς καὶ περὶ ταῦτα ὑφεστῶτα, παραιτήσομαι λέγειν βαθυτάτης οὔσης τῆς τοιαύτης πραγματείας καὶ ἄλλης μείζονος δεομένης ἐξετάσεως; trans. Barnes (Oxford, 2003), 3.10–15. See R. Chiaradonna, "What Is Porphyry's *Isagoge*?" *Documenti e studi sulla tradizione filosofica medievale* 19 (2008): 1–30.

2 See, among others, L. Benakis, "The Problem of General Concepts in Neoplatonism and Byzantine Thought," in *Neoplatonism and Christian Thought*, ed. D. O'Meara (Norfolk, 1982), 75–86; K. Ierodiakonou, "John Italos on Universals," *Documenti e studi sulla tradizione filosofica medievale* 18 (2007): 231–47; eadem, "Metaphysics in the Byzantine Tradition: Eustratios of Nicaea on Universals," *Quaestio* 5 (2005): 67–82; eadem, "The Byzantine Reception of Aristotle's *Categories*," *Synthesis Philosophica* 39 (2005): 7–31; P. Joannou, "Die Definition des Seins bei Eustratios von Nikaia: Die Universalienlehre in der Byzantinischen Theologie im XI Jh.," *BZ* 47 (1954): 358–68; A. del Campo Echevarría, *La teoría platónica de las Ideas en Bizancio (siglos IX–XI)* (Madrid, 2012); A. Lloyd, "The Aristotelianism of Eustratios of Nicaea," in *Aristoteles, Werk und Wirkung*, vol. 2, ed. J. Wiesner (Berlin, 1987), 341–51.

3 Cf. C. Erismann, "The Trinity, Universals, and Particular Substances: Philoponus and Roscelin," *Traditio* 53 (2008): 277–305.

More than Trinitarian theology, however, is at stake. During late antiquity and the ninth century, one theological question in particular gave rise to a thorough reflection on the status of universal entities: the problem of the humanity of Christ, that is, the question of whether Christ's assumed humanity was particular or universal. The problem was frequently debated during the patristic period; Gregory of Nyssa for example offers very interesting views on the question.<sup>4</sup> Later, advocates of Chalcedonian Christology were challenged by their Miaphysite opponents, but the debate did not stop, and as we will see was renewed by the Iconoclast crisis that tore Byzantium apart during the eighth and the ninth centuries. This paper will focus on this last chapter in the history of the debates regarding the ontological status of the humanity of Christ, the time of Iconoclasm.

The Byzantine discussion about the humanity of Christ is of interest to the historian of philosophy for three reasons. First, it illustrates the strong link between theology and Aristotelian logic in post-Chalcedonian thought—the use of Aristotelian material by Severus of Antioch “forced” the Chalcedonian side to do the same. From various texts that offer definitions of terms, we know that logic was part of the intellectual equipment of polemical writers. A good example for Christology is the *Preparation* (Προπαρασκευή) of Theodore of Raithu.<sup>5</sup> John of Damascus, in turn, was convinced of the importance of the study of logic for solving dogmatic issues. Finally, the use of Aristotelian logic is one of the characteristics of the argumentative method developed some time after the Seventh Ecumenical Council of Nicaea in 787 by the last generation of iconophile thinkers. The debate about the humanity of Christ is among the most striking examples of a theological question analyzed with the help of philosophical concepts.

Second, it shows the philosophical and logical culture of the theologians who tackled this issue. In order to determine whether Christ's assumed humanity is particular or universal, one has to explain first what it means for an entity to be universal. Thus it constitutes a good source of clear statements about the status of

universals, according to these theologians. In the case of Theodore the Studite, it is the only place in his writings where we can find such information. Even in the case of an author like Photius, who discusses the problem of secondary substances and universals per se,<sup>6</sup> it is useful to study his approach to resolving the problem to see whether his position is consistent.

Third, the nature of the questioning itself is remarkable, and it constitutes an important and hitherto neglected step in the history of the problem of universals itself. In modern scholarship, the standard history of the problem of universals is that first the ancients and then the medievals, following the famous set of questions at the beginning of Porphyry's *Isagoge*, concentrated on the ontological status of genera and species, and that the modern debate turned to focus more on properties. What is remarkable about the question of the humanity of Christ is that it presents otherwise unknown statements about universals, indeed statements related precisely to what metaphysicians today consider to be the real problem of universals, namely the question of the universality of properties.<sup>7</sup> The authors I will discuss do not focus on the question of the extramental existence of species and genera, but rather explore—indeed just as metaphysicians would do nowadays—the possibility and implications of

6 Photius wrote a number of works on Aristotelian logic. He deals with the philosophical question of universals in two of his *Amphilochia*: the 77th, devoted to Porphyry's *Isagoge*, and the 138th, on the category of substance. In addition, Photius composed scholia on the *Isagoge* and *Categories* which can be found intertwined with Ammonius's commentaries in various manuscripts (Monacensis graecus 222, Parisinus graecus 1928, and Escorialensis Φ 3.10). These scholia are probably earlier versions of the *Amphilochia* reflecting Photius's early teaching activities.

7 For a standard modern account of the problem of universals see J.-P. Moreland, *Universals* (Montreal, 2001), 1: “The problem of universals is actually a set of related issues involving the ontological status of properties. . . . However, since the problem of universals is about the ontological status of properties, it goes beyond the One and Many and includes these questions: Do properties exist? If properties exist, are they universals or particulars? If properties are universals, are they abstract objects? What is the relationship between a property and the thing that has it? Is the property in what has it and, if so, what sort of “in” is this (spatial, non-spatial)? If properties exist, can they exist even if no particulars exemplify them? In addition to properties and concrete particulars (roughly, individual things like balls and baboons), are there property-instances? If so, are they simple or complex entities? If properties are universals, what account can be given of the individuation of two entities that have all their pure properties in common?”

4 See J. Zachhuber, “L'individualité de l'humanité de Jésus-Christ selon quelques Pères de l'Église,” *RSR* 90 (2016): 35–50.

5 Theodore of Raithu's *Praeparatio* (Προπαρασκευή) or *Liber de Incarnatione* is edited by Franz Diekamp in *Analecta Patristica: Texte und Abhandlungen zur griechischen Patristik*, OCA 117 (Rome, 1938), 185–222.

admitting that a property (humanity, in this case) can be shared by many individuals.

In what follows, I shall not deal with the theological aspect of the problem, nor try to present the Christology of the authors under discussion,<sup>8</sup> but focus instead on what we can learn from this debate about the theory of universals held by those authors, as well as their ontology, their understanding of essential properties like humanity, and their explanation of individuality. The two main goals of this paper are the following: First, to demonstrate the importance of late ancient and middle Byzantine discussions about the humanity of Christ as sources of the first order for philosophical and logical questions about universals, essences, and properties; as well as to show that these constitute striking examples of the interaction between theology and logic. And second, to reconstruct the positions on the status of universals held by three authors ranging from the eighth to the ninth centuries—John of Damascus, Theodore the Studite, and Photius—based on their respective analyses of the question of the particularity or universality of the humanity of Christ.

### The Terms of the Debate

According to the Christian dogma established during the Council of Chalcedon in 451, Christ is both fully God and fully human. This is stated by the well-known Chalcedonian Creed:

Following therefore the holy Fathers, we all unanimously teach to confess one and the same Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, the same perfect in divinity and the same perfect in humanity [καὶ τέλειον τὸν αὐτὸν ἐν ἀνθρωπότητι], the same truly God and truly man [ἄνθρωπον ἀληθῶς] composed of a rational soul and body, consubstantial with the Father as to the divinity and consubstantial with us as to humanity [ὁμοούσιον ἡμῖν τὸν αὐτὸν κατὰ τὴν ἀνθρωπότητα]; like us in all things but sin. The same was begotten from the Father before the ages as to the divinity and in the latter days for us and our salvation was born

as to his humanity [κατὰ τὴν ἀνθρωπότητα]  
from Mary the Virgin Mother of God.<sup>9</sup>

Transposed into philosophical language, this means that the individual Jesus Christ has a human essence—in modern terms, an essential property of humanity. Possessing this property makes him a man and renders him consubstantial—that is, of the same essence—with all other human beings. The Greek text renders well the distinction between a concrete individual man (ἄνθρωπος) and the abstract property of humanity (ἀνθρωπότης). The ontological framework that was dominant at the time, based on kind essentialism<sup>10</sup> and constituent ontology,<sup>11</sup> relates the fact of being a man to that of belonging to the human species and to having—not to say instantiating—the essential property or essence of humanity. This property is essential—as opposed to accidental—as it is necessary for every human being to possess, while an accidental property is one that an individual happens to have but that it could also lack. A property or essence can be considered to be either universal or particular. A universal property is common to and the same in many individuals, while a particular property can be found in only one individual and can never be found again as such in any other individual. So which one is the case for the humanity of Christ? The humanity of Christ may be universal, that is, common to him and all other humans, and thus

9 E. Schwartz, ed., *Acta conciliorum oecumenicorum: Concilium universale Chalcedonense anno 451*, 2.1.2:129.23–29: Ἐπόμενοι τοίνυν τοῖς ἁγίοις πατράσιν ἓνα καὶ τὸν αὐτὸν ὁμολογεῖν υἱὸν τὸν κύριον ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦν Χριστὸν συμφώνως ἅπαντες ἐκδιδάσκουμεν, τέλειον τὸν αὐτὸν ἐν θεότητι καὶ τέλειον τὸν αὐτὸν ἐν ἀνθρωπότητι, θεὸν ἀληθῶς καὶ ἄνθρωπον ἀληθῶς τὸν αὐτὸν ἐκ ψυχῆς λογικῆς καὶ σώματος, ὁμοούσιον τῷ πατρὶ κατὰ τὴν θεότητα καὶ ὁμοούσιον ἡμῖν τὸν αὐτὸν κατὰ τὴν ἀνθρωπότητα, κατὰ πάντα ὅμοιον ἡμῖν χωρὶς ἁμαρτίας, πρὸ αἰώνων μὲν ἐκ τοῦ πατρὸς γεννηθέντα κατὰ τὴν θεότητα, ἐπ' ἐσχάτων δὲ τῶν ἡμερῶν τὸν αὐτὸν δι' ἡμᾶς καὶ διὰ τὴν ἡμετέραν σωτηρίαν ἐκ Μαρίας τῆς παρθένου τῆς θεοτόκου κατὰ τὴν ἀνθρωπότητα. . . .

10 Kind essentialism is a philosophical position based on two main tenets: The first is that all and only the members of a given kind (i.e., of a given species) have a common essence. The second thesis is that the essence of a kind (or species) is responsible for the traits typically associated with the members (i.e., the individuals) of that specific universal.

11 A constituent ontology is based on the conviction that properties are in some sense constituents of the particulars that have (or instantiate) them; in the Byzantine Aristotelian version, it means that an individual is constituted of essential properties (i.e., its substance) and of accidental properties.

8 For such a discussion see for example the traditional work of J. Meyendorff, *Le Christ dans la théologie byzantine* (Paris, 1969), chapters 8, 9, and 10 (English translation: *Christ in Eastern Christian Thought* [Crestwood, NY, 1975]).

be one and the same in each man or woman. But it may also be particular, and thus be only Jesus's humanity, which resembles, but is however different from, the humanity of Peter or Paul.

The various answers to the question will be formulated according to three sets of alternatives. These are basically similar to the alternatives described by Porphyry, but they are often formulated using a vocabulary proper to the Greek patristic and Byzantine logical tradition.

The first alternative concerns the mode of being, or to use a more Byzantine expression, the way in which a thing is considered (θεωρούμενον) to be. An item could have two basic ways to exist: it can be either intramental as a concept or thought, or extramental as an object in sensible reality. In the first case the concept or mental content (θεωρία) exists in thought, representation, or imagination (ἐπινοία, φαντασία, etc.). It could be more or less fictitious or imaginary, depending on how much it is grounded in a process of abstraction. If an entity exists in reality, then two modes of being are also possible: by itself (per se), or in a second entity. Existence per se (καθ' αὐτὸ εἶναι) is the mode of being of individuals or hypostases (ἄτομα, ὑποστάσεις, καθ' ἑκάστα), like Peter or Paul or this cat. These entities are said to be ontologically independent, as they do not require a second entity in order to exist. The concept of self-subsistence is expressed by the Greek adjectives αὐθυπόστατον and αὐθύπαρκτον.<sup>12</sup> Attributing this mode of being to universals is impossible for an Aristotelian or Aristotelizing philosopher, as we always see in reality this or that particular horse, never "equinity" or "horseness." If an entity does not exist by itself, it can exist in and thanks to another entity. In that case, it would exist in an individual, ἐν ἀτόμῳ. This could be, first, the mode of being of an accident (συμβεβηκός), like the accident of whiteness in a white object, let us say the white in this swan; but it could also be the mode of being of universal essential entities, that is, of genera and species. In that case a species, for example, exists entirely realized in each of the individuals that

belong to it, and is said to be "considered" in others (ἐν ἄλλοις θεωρούμενον).<sup>13</sup> The species *cat* exists in each and every individual cat. The universal, then, is said to subsist in individuals (ἐν τοῖς ἀτόμοις, ἐν τοῖς κατὰ μέρος ὑφ' ἐστάναι). Sometimes this fact is expressed through the concept of ἐνυπόστατον, that is, realized in a hypostasis.<sup>14</sup> If one accepts this ontological model, then no exception is allowed to the instantiation principle, that is, to the ontological law that it is impossible for a specific universal or nature to subsist without being instantiated by at least one individual. This is expressed by the general principle according to which there is no essence or nature that is not realized in a hypostasis—οὐκ ἔστιν φύσις (οὐσία) ἀνυπόστατος<sup>15</sup>—a principle accepted by both the Miaphysite and the Chalcedonian sides. The principle indeed leaves open the question whether the essence or nature is particularized or not when it is instantiated by the individual.

John of Damascus constitutes a good starting point, as he offers a clear and almost comprehensive list of the various possible answers to the question of the universality or particularity of Christ's humanity, as well as arguments for rejecting some of them.

13 It is difficult to render properly expressions of the form ἐν τινι θεωρούμενον. The word θεωρούμενον in this context could be translated "contemplated," "observed," or "considered"; see LSJ s.v. θεωρέω 3.2. In this article, I translate the participial form θεωρούμενον as "considered," following the example of several authoritative translations of late ancient logical texts, such as the translation of Simplicius's commentary on the *Categories* by B. Fleet (160.21–22: ἐν πλείοσιν θεωρουμένη is translated as "considered in many things") and of Philoponus's commentary on the *Posterior Analytics* by O. Goldin (371.31: θεωρούμενον ἐν τῷ ὑποκειμένῳ is translated as "considered in the subject").

14 See for example Maximus the Confessor, *Letter* 15, 557D–560A: ἐνυπόστατον δὲ, τὸ καθ' αὐτὸ μὲν οὐδαμῶς ὑφ' ἑστάναι, ἐν ἄλλοις δὲ θεωρούμενον, ὡς εἶδος ἐν τοῖς ὑπ' αὐτὸ ἀτόμοις. On Maximus's usage of this term and on the logical dimension of his thought see C. Erismann, "Maximus the Confessor on the Logical Dimension of the Structure of Reality," in *The Architecture of the Cosmos in the Thought of Maximus the Confessor*, ed. P. Annala, T. Lankila, and A. Lévy (Turku, 2015), 51–69. On the history of the term ἐνυπόστατον see B. Gleede, *The Development of the Term ἐνυπόστατος from Origen to John of Damascus* (Leiden, 2012).

15 On the philosophical dimension of this (originally theological) principle see C. Erismann, "Non Est Natura Sine Persona: The Issue of Uninstantiated Universals from Late Antiquity to the Early Middle Ages," in *Methods and Methodologies: Aristotelian Logic East and West, 500–1500*, ed. M. Cameron and J. Marenbon (Leiden, 2011), 75–92.

12 This characteristic is the central component in the standard and omnipresent Byzantine definition of substance: οὐσία ἐστὶ πρᾶγμα αὐθύπαρκτον μὴ δεόμενον ἑτέρου πρὸς σύστασιν. Among the authors treated in this article, the definition is mentioned by John of Damascus (*Expositio fidei* §50, ed. Kotter, 119: 4, as well as in §40 of the *Dialectica*, ed. Kotter, 106.1) and by Photius in *Amphilochion* 138, which is dedicated to essence (lines 26–29).



## John of Damascus

The eighth-century theologian and author of the influential handbook of logic called *Philosophical Chapters*, or more commonly *Dialectica*,<sup>16</sup> John of Damascus († 749)<sup>17</sup> addresses the question of the humanity of Christ as a step in the Christological outline of his *Expositio fidei*. The relevant passage describes three possible understandings of the status of the humanity of Christ. It is also a very interesting passage as it

summarizes several key points of John of Damascus's ontology and theory of universals. It is structured in two parts, offering first a consideration of general ontology—that is, not only relevant to the case of Christ—about the various ways to consider a nature or specific universal, and second a discussion about which of the aforementioned possibilities corresponds precisely to the humanity of Christ.

The first part of the passage reads as follows:

Περὶ τῆς ἐν εἶδει καὶ ἐν ἀτόμῳ θεωρουμένης φύσεως [. . .]

Ἡ φύσις ἢ ψιλῇ θεωρία κατανοεῖται (καθ' αὐτὴν γὰρ οὐχ ὑφέστηκεν), ἢ κοινῶς ἐν πάσαις ταῖς ὁμοειδέσιν ὑποστάσεσι ταύτας συνάπτουσα καὶ λέγεται ἐν τῷ εἶδει θεωρουμένη φύσις, ἢ ὁλικῶς ἢ αὐτὴ ἐν προσλήψει συμβεβηκότων ἐν μιᾷ ὑποστάσει καὶ λέγεται ἐν ἀτόμῳ θεωρουμένη φύσις.<sup>18</sup>

On nature considered in the species and in the individual

Nature is apprehended either (1) in mere speculation (for it does not subsist by itself); or (2) as common in all the hypostases of a same species, joining them together, and is then called “nature considered in the species”; or (3) entirely in one hypostasis, the same [as in the species, but] with the addition of accidents, and is then called “nature considered in the individual.”

In this text John of Damascus sketches the map of the various modes of being (even if [1] is not a mode of *being* properly speaking) of a nature. They could be described as follows: (1) as a speculative consideration, (2) as realized in a plurality of individuals, and (3) as seen in one single individual. To have a more comprehensive list, we should add a fourth solution not mentioned here by John, but explicitly rejected in other parts of his work. This (4) is nature as particularized by and proper to a given individual. Before discussing this fourth possibility, I would like to comment on the three options delineated by John.

(1) In the first mode, nature is considered as a generality without relation to individuals, a purely mental concept with no proper existence. This is doubly underlined by John, first by qualifying the speculation as “mere” (ψιλῇ), in the sense of not being supported by individuals; and second by adding the ontological thesis that nature in this status does not subsist by itself.<sup>19</sup> For John Damascene, nature has to be instantiated in order to subsist, as he adopts the principle that there is no nature that is not realized in a hypostasis.<sup>20</sup> Nature is not self-subsistent; if it is not realized in individuals,

16 On this text see G. Richter, *Die Dialektik des Johannes von Damaskos: Eine Untersuchung des Textes nach seinen Quellen und seiner Bedeutung* (Passau, 1964); K. Oehler, “Die Dialektik des Johannes Damaskenos,” in *Antike Philosophie und Byzantinisches Mittelalter* (Munich, 1969), 287–99; and A. Siclari, *Giovanni di Damasco: La funzione della “dialettica”* (Perugia, 1978).

17 For a general presentation see A. Louth, *St. John Damascene: Tradition and Originality in Byzantine Theology* (Oxford, 2002). For his dates see V. Conticello, “Jean Damascène,” in *Dictionnaire des philosophes antiques*, vol. 3, ed. R. Goulet (Paris, 2000), 1001–27. See also the useful volume of collected studies by V. Kontouma, *John of Damascus: New Studies on His Life and Works* (Farnham, 2015).

18 John of Damascus, *Expositio fidei* 55 (3.11), ed. Kotter, *Die Schriften des Johannes von Damaskos*, vol. 2 (Berlin, 1973), 131.4–7. Unless otherwise noted, translations throughout are my own.

For a discussion of this passage see R. Cross, “Perichoresis, Deification and Christological Predication in John of Damascus,” *MedSt* 62 (2000): 69–124.

19 See also *Expositio fidei* 50 (3.6), which makes the same point: “Essence does not subsist in itself, but is considered in hypostases,” ed. Kotter 120.15–16: ἡ οὐσία δὲ, καθ' ἑαυτὴν οὐχ ὑφίσταται, ἀλλ' ἐν ταῖς ὑποστάσεσι θεωρεῖται.

20 In his *De duabus in Christo voluntatibus* 5 (Kotter 413.4), John states explicitly that “there is no essence which is not realized in a hypostasis, nor is there a nature which is not realized in a person” (οὐσία μὲν ἀνυπόστατος οὐκ ἔστιν οὐδὲ φύσις ἀπρόσωπος). See also C. Erismann, “A World of Hypostases: John of Damascus's Rethinking of Aristotle's Categorical Ontology,” *StP* 50 (2010): 251–69.

it is only a chimera, an empty thought. Here we can see a clear rejection of Platonism concerning the universals.

The meaning of *θεωρία* here is not easy to determine; it could be either a concept or a speculation. Richard Cross mobilizes a theory of abstraction here. However, I do not think that this is the point. Nature here is not the result of a rational process of abstraction based on the observation of individuals, but more an empty thought.

(2) Nature is realized in the individuals, without distinction between them. In this case, nature expresses what is ontologically common to all the members of the species. John frequently says that nature is “apprehended” in the hypostases. Thus, here it is considered in a variety of individuals, taking into consideration not their individualizing features but simply their common nature.

(3) Nature is in one given individual; John here considers the individual as a whole constituted by the common nature, to which he adds the accidents. But the nature is not particularized. This is clearly expressed by the phrase *ἡ αὐτή*. For John, a hypostasis,

or an individual like Peter or Paul, is a self-subsisting entity constituted by the universal essence—humanity in this case—and a bundle of accidental properties;<sup>21</sup> each individual possesses a unique bundle which differentiates him from the other. This is the set of accidental properties that are proper to the individual, not the essence. The essence is entirely (*ὁλικῶς*) realized in each individual of the species. In his *Dialectica* (§31, ed. Kotter, 94.16–19), John explains that the species is entirely realized in each of its individuals equally and integrally (*ὁμοίως καὶ ἀπαρλείπτως*).

A short excursus is needed here, as the terminology used in solutions (2) and (3) is borrowed from Leontius of Byzantium, who presented the question of the humanity of Christ clearly as an alternative between only these two solutions. In his *Refutation of Severus (Epilyseis)*, Leontius offers a dialogue between a partisan of Severus and an orthodox speaker representing Leontius’s own position. My point here is not about Leontius himself, but just to highlight the background of John of Damascus’s terminology.<sup>22</sup> Here is Leontius’s text:

ἈΝΤΙΘΕΣΙΣ ἈΚΕΦΑΛΟΥ. φύσιν ὁ Λόγος ἀναλαβὼν ἀνθρωπίνην, τὴν ἐν τῷ εἶδει θεωρουμένην ἢ τὴν ἐν ἀτόμῳ ἀνέλαβεν;

ἈΠΙΝΤΗΣΙΣ ὉΡΘΟΔΟΞΟΥ. Τί γάρ; Ἐτερον οἶε ταύτην εἶναι παρ’ ἐκείνην;

ἈΚΕΦ. Ναί, εἴπερ ἡ μὲν ἐν πλῆθει θεωρεῖται, ἡ δὲ ἐν τῷ ἀριθμῷ.

ὉΡΘ. Ἀλλ’ οὐ πρὸς ὃ ἠρώτησα ἀπρεκρίθης. Οὐ γὰρ εἰ ἐν πλῆθει καὶ ἐνὶ θεωρεῖται αὕτη τὸ ζητούμενόν ἐστιν—τοῦτο γὰρ ὡμολόγηται—ἀλλ’ εἰ αὕτη ἐκείνη, καὶ ἐκείνη αὕτη, ἢ ἑτέρα οὐσα τυγχάνει. Τὸ γὰρ ἐν ἐνὶ ἢ ἐν πλείοσι ταύτην θεωρεῖσθαι, τὰ ἐν οἷς ἔστι πολλὰ ἢ ἐν θεωρεῖσθαι ποιεῖ, οὐ τὴν φύσιν ἐν ἢ πολλὰ φαίνεσθαι παρασκευάζει. Ὡς περ ἀμέλει ἐπὶ τε λευκοῦ ἔχει καὶ τοῦ λελευκασμένου, εἴτε ἐν εἴτε πλείονα ὡς τὰ ἐν οἷς ἢ λευκότης θεωρεῖται.

Objection of the Acephal: In assuming human nature, did the Word assume the [nature] considered in the species, or the [nature considered] in the individual?

Response of the Orthodox: Why do you ask? Do you think the latter is different than the former?

A: Yes, if indeed the one is considered in a multitude [of individuals], and the other in a single individual.

O: You did not answer my question. For the topic under discussion is not if nature is considered in a multitude or in one individual—as we have already agreed on this—but if one is the same as the other and vice versa or if it happens that they are different. For the fact that nature is considered either in one individual or in a multitude makes that in which nature is considered multiple or one, but does not prove that the nature appears

21 This understanding of hypostasis is of Cappadocian origin. John refers to it by saying that “the hypostasis is defined as an essence plus accidents”: τὴν ὑπόστασιν ὀρίζονται οὐσίαν μετὰ συμβεβηκότων (*Expositio fidei* §50, 3.6, ed. Kotter 120.11). Closer to John of Damascus, we find it in Pamphilus’s *Diversorum capitum seu difficultatum solutio* (οὐσίαν μετὰ ιδιωμάτων, ed. Declerck, CCSG 19:128.7).

John’s own understanding of hypostasis is nevertheless more elaborate as it includes the addition of the notion of actual existence to this definition.

22 The text has been well discussed by R. Cross, “Individual Natures in the Christology of Leontius of Byzantium,” *JECrSt* 10 (2002): 245–65.

“Οτι δὲ ταῦτα οὕτως ἔχει, δῆλον ἐξ ὧν ὁ τῆς φύσεως λόγος ἐπὶ τε πλήθους καὶ ἐνὸς ὁ αὐτὸς ἀποδίδεται· ὃν γὰρ ἂν ἀποδῶς λόγον περὶ τῆς ἀπλῶς φύσεως, οὗτός σοι καὶ ἐπὶ τῆς ἐν τινὶ θεωρουμένης ἀποδοθήσεται, καὶ οὔτε πολλὰς ποιεῖ φύσεις τὴν μίαν τὸ πολλοὺς ταύτης μετέχειν, οὔτε μίαν τὰς πολλὰς, κἂν εἰς τούτων μετέχῃ, ἐὰν ᾗ ὁ ταύτη<sup>23</sup> μετέχων ἐκ διαφορῶν συγκεῖμενος.

ἈΚΕΦ. Τὴν τινὰ οὖν ἀνέλαβε φύσιν;

ὍΡΘ. Ναὶ· ἀλλὰ τὴν αὐτὴν οὔσαν τῷ εἶδει.<sup>24</sup>

to be one or multiple. And the same goes doubtless in the case of the white and the whitened: namely whether that in which whiteness is considered is either one or more. The fact that such things are so is clear from this, that is that the same definition of nature is given in the case both of a multitude and of a single individual. For whichever definition you assign for nature in the absolute sense will also be the definition you assign for nature when it is considered in a given individual; and neither the fact that a multitude of individuals share in the same nature renders the unique nature several, nor are several natures rendered one even if it is only one individual who shares in them, if the one who participates thus is composed of different natures.

A. So did He assume a certain individual nature?

O. Absolutely, but the same nature as in the species.

It is clear that for Leontius, nature considered in the species or in a given individual is the same. The number of instantiations of a given nature, that is to say the number of conspecific individuals under consideration, does not multiply or alter that nature. John follows Leontius on this point and supplements Leontius's doctrine by adding the set of accidents.

To return to our argument, we have already noted that John of Damascus failed to add a fourth possible solution to the three described above, namely the following:

(4) Particularized (*merike* or *idia*) nature. This would be the solution of John Philoponus, who views nature as particularized.<sup>25</sup> In this case, nature is no

longer universal, but becomes the nature of this given individual. So there exist according to this view the humanity of Peter and the humanity of Paul; the two humanities are not identical but only similar. John of Damascus, being faithful to the Cappadocians in this respect, rejects this solution, as for him an *ousia* is necessarily common—*koinon*—and is never particularized.<sup>26</sup>

this common nature of man, in which no one differs from any other, when it is realized in any one of the individuals, then is particular to that one and is not common to any other individual. . . . Thus that rational mortal animal that is in me is not common to any other man. Neither would the animal nature that is in this particular horse be in any other” (Αὕτη δὲ οὖν ἡ κοινὴ φύσις, ἡ ἀνθρώπου, καθ’ ἣν οὐδεὶς ἀνθρώπος οὐδενὸς διενήνοχεν, ἐν ἐκάστῳ τῶν ἀτόμων γινομένη ἰδίᾳ λοιπὸν ἐκείνου καὶ οὐδενὸς ἑτέρου κοινὴ γίνεται. . . . Τὸ γὰρ ἐν ἐμοὶ ζῶον λογικὸν θνητὸν οὐδενὶ τῶν ἄλλων ἀνθρώπων ἐστὶ κοινὸν οὐδὲ ἡ ἐν τῷδε τῷ ἵππῳ τοῦ ζώου φύσις ἐν ἄλλῳ τινὶ γένοιτ’ ἂν), ed. Kotter 52.52–54 and 66–67.

26 In the thought of Basil of Caesarea and of his brother Gregory of Nyssa, the distinction between essence (*ousia*) and hypostasis was superimposed upon that between the common (*koinon*) and the particular (*idion*). To express this with an analogy, *ousia* is related to hypostasis as the common is to the particular. On these grounds, Basil states that “there is the same difference between essence and hypostasis as between what is common and what is particular, for example, between animal and a certain man” (*Letter* 236, ed. Courtonne 3, 53.1–3: Οὐσία δὲ καὶ ὑπόστασις ταύτην ἔχει τὴν διαφορὰν ἣν ἔχει τὸ κοινὸν πρὸς τὸ καθ’ ἕκαστον, οἷον ὡς ἔχει τὸ ζῶον πρὸς τὸν δεινὰ ἀνθρώπων). The logical consequence of this claim is that an *ousia* is necessarily a common entity.

23 Daley's text has ταύτης, but we should probably assume that ταύτης is a scribal error for ταύτη. I am very grateful to Byron MacDougall for this suggestion.

24 Leontius of Byzantium, *Solutio argumentorum a Severo obsectorum*, ed. in B. Daley, “Leontius of Byzantium: A Critical Edition of his Works, with Prolegomena” (PhD diss., Oxford, 1978), 77.16–78.7 (= PG 86b:1916D–1917C).

25 For Philoponus, any kind of shared or common entity is impossible. Everything that exists is particular. This means that humanity, for example, could not be common to Peter or to Paul. Instantiation, that is, the realization in one individual, implies particularization for Philoponus. He states this clearly in his *Arbiter*, of which the seventh chapter is preserved in Greek by John of Damascus in his treatise *On Heresies*, as a supplement to heresy 83. There Philoponus rejects the idea that an essence may be common to several individuals: “Now,

Let us see now how John applies this scheme to the case of the humanity of Christ:

Ὁ οὖν θεὸς λόγος σαρκωθείς οὔτε τὴν ἐν ψιλῇ θεωρίᾳ κατανοουμένην φύσιν ἀνέλαβεν (οὐ γὰρ σάρκωσις τοῦτο, ἀλλ' ἀπάτη καὶ πλάσμα σαρκώσεως)

οὔτε τὴν ἐν τῷ εἶδει θεωρουμένην (οὐ γὰρ πάσας τὰς ὑποστάσεις ἀνέλαβεν),

ἀλλὰ τὴν ἐν ἀτόμῳ τὴν αὐτὴν οὖσαν τῷ εἶδει (ἀπαρχὴν γὰρ ἀνέλαβε τοῦ ἡμετέρου φυράματος), οὐ καθ' αὐτὴν ὑποστάσαν καὶ ἄτομον χρηματίσασαν πρότερον καὶ οὕτως ὑπ' αὐτοῦ προσληφθεῖσαν, ἀλλ' ἐν τῇ αὐτοῦ ὑποστάσει ὑπάρξασαν.

... Ταῦτόν οὖν ἐστὶν εἰπεῖν φύσιν τοῦ λόγου καὶ τὴν ἐν ἀτόμῳ φύσιν· οὔτε γὰρ τὸ ἄτομον ἡγουν τὴν ὑπόστασιν κυρίως καὶ μόνως δηλοῖ οὔτε τὸ κοινὸν τῶν ὑποστάσεων, ἀλλὰ τὴν κοινὴν φύσιν ἐν μιᾷ τῶν ὑποστάσεων θεωρουμένην καὶ ἐξεταζομένην.<sup>27</sup>

Now, when God the Word became incarnated, He did not assume the human nature in mere speculation—for that would have been no real incarnation, but a fraudulent and fictitious one. [rejection of 1]

Nor did He assume it as considered in the species (because He did not assume all the individuals) [of the species, i.e., all the human beings]. [rejection of 2]

But He did assume the nature considered in the individual (which is the same as the nature considered in the species). [acceptance of 3] For He assumed the first fruits of our clay not as self-subsistent and having been an individual previously and as such taken on by Him, but as having its subsistence in His hypostasis.

... It is therefore the same thing to say “the nature of the Word” as it is to say “nature taken individually,” for it properly and exclusively shows not the individual, the hypostasis, that is to say, nor that which is common to (all) hypostases, but the common nature as considered and examined in one of the hypostases.

We can recapitulate John's solution. With respect to incarnation:

Mode of being (1) is impossible. The incarnation would not be real. If Christ did not assume a real entity—and universals as such, that is, not instantiated, are not real entities—then there is no real incarnation.

Mode (2) is impossible, as it would mean that Christ assumed the species not in its intension (i.e., its internal content) but in its extension (i.e., its range of applicability). Here John chooses to understand species not as an essential property common to all the members of the species and expressed by the definition, but as the set of individuals belonging to the species. According to this reading, assuming the specific humanity means assuming Peter, Paul, and every other human being.

Mode (3) is correct; but John clearly states that we should not distinguish it from nature considered in the species, being here understood according to its “intension,” that is, according to what it means to be a human being. That part of the solution according to

which Christ assumed a nature that “has not been an individual previously” has been added here to make it clear that Christ did not assume someone else's nature, that is, a nature that already belonged to an individual. Christ is responsible for the realization or instantiation of human nature, by ensuring its subsistence in his own hypostasis.

For the sake of completeness, let us say that mode (4) is impossible because if Christ simply assumed a particularized humanity, then the incarnation would be ineffective for other human beings. Substantial unity of the species is needed in order to ensure salvation.

The solution John offers in the *Expositio fidei* occupies the middle ground, as it tries to combine the universality of the common nature and the individual reality of the hypostasis.

If John of Damascus's analysis is embedded in patristic Christological controversies and is formulated in his exposition of dogmatic theology, the next two authors to be considered here tackle the issue from a completely different background. It is often interesting to ask why a particular philosophical question

27 John of Damascus, *Expositio fidei* 55 (3.11), ed. Kotter 131.8–21.



comes to the fore at a given historical moment. Of course, one can always refer to the personal interests of the authors in question, but sometimes there are external reasons that explain why a debate becomes timely. It can be for philosophical and theological reasons, or it can be because of the appearance or spread of a heresy. In the present case, it is possible to identify a precise explanation, which is to be found in the struggle over images, the so-called crisis of Iconoclasm that played out in Byzantium over the eighth and ninth centuries. During this time, there was a crisis of unique intensity regarding religious practice and the worship of icons. When Theodore the Studite, one of the major actors in this dispute, considers the issue of the humanity of Christ, he does so within the framework of his support for the veneration of images. While the crisis was mainly over by the time Photius wrote his *Amphilochia* (the cult of icons was restored in 843), the struggle nevertheless left a deep imprint on cultural memory that lasted long thereafter, notably on Photius, who grew up under the shadow of Iconoclastic persecution.<sup>28</sup>

### Theodore the Studite

With Theodore, the problem of the universality or particularity of the humanity of Christ was revived by an argument frequently used by the Iconoclasts,<sup>29</sup> which can be summarized as follows: Christ assumed general humanity<sup>30</sup>—or more precisely the nature of human

flesh (τὴν τῆς σαρκὸς φύσιν)<sup>31</sup> or the mere matter of human substance (ὅλη μόνη ἐστὶν ἀνθρωπίνης οὐσίας), to use the expressions of the definition of the Iconoclast Council of Hiereia—without personal features. Any portrait of Christ with particular features—which is the only way to depict him—would result from the arbitrary choice of the painter, and as such would be idolatrous.<sup>32</sup>

More broadly, the controversy about the worship of images plays a role in discussions about the ontology and logic of Christ's properties. The two problems are related by that of the representation of Christ. One of the favorite arguments of the enemies of images is that it is impossible to represent Christ. The argument reduces both alternatives to heresy, and proceeds as follows: In a portrait of Christ, either the divine nature is portrayed along with the human nature or is it not. It is impossible to portray divinity. Either the divine nature is confused with the human nature, which is miaphysitism—that is, the heresy holding that Christ has not two natures, but one—or else, if only the human nature is portrayed the two natures are separated, which is the heresy called Nestorianism. In response to this, defenders of icons offer another dilemma. If Christ cannot be portrayed, then either he lacks a genuine human nature, which is the heresy called docetism, or his human nature is submerged in his divinity, which once again is miaphysitism. According to the iconophiles, if Christ's human nature is not changed by or confused with his divine nature, then it must be possible to portray him like

28 On Photius's concerns regarding Iconoclasm see F. Dvornik, "The Patriarch Photius and Iconoclasm," *DOP* 7 (1953): 67–97; C. Mango, "The Liquidation of Iconoclasm and the Patriarch Photios," in *Iconoclasm: Papers Given at the Ninth Spring Symposium of Byzantine Studies*, ed. A. Bryer and J. Herrin (Birmingham, 1977), 133–40; and D. Stratoudaki-White, "Patriarch Photius and the Conclusion of Iconoclasm," *GOTR* 44 (1999): 341–55.

29 For a reconstruction of the Christology of the Second Iconoclasm see B. Lourié, "Le second iconoclasm en recherche de la vraie doctrine," *StP* 34 (2000): 145–69.

30 As well noted by B. Lourié ("Second iconoclasm," 151), both Iconophile and Iconoclast thinkers agreed on the fact that the assumed humanity is universal: "Les deux partis, les iconoclastes aussi bien que les iconophiles, ont été d'accord pour considérer que l'humanité du Christ est l'humanité générique, de sorte que les traits individuels de Jésus ne sont attribuables à aucune personne humaine." I might add that the two sides' understanding of the generic humanity is different because of their opposing views on universals.

31 This is precisely the expression used by Theodore when he introduces an argument after the Iconoclasts.

32 I completely agree with V. Baranov's careful remarks on this point: "Yet one important remark has to be made: it would be unrealistic to think that the Iconoclasts believed in a shapeless and faceless Christ, contrary to the Gospels' account. They used this doctrine in an epistemological and not in an ontological sense for polemical purposes against the claim of the Iconodules that Christ can and should be depicted. Essentially, the Iconoclastic argument can be reduced to the point that whatever image the Iconodules represented under the name 'Christ' on the icon, cannot be a true image since we simply cannot know what Christ looked like. Thus the Iconoclasts concluded that any material representation of Christ is false by definition and the Iconodules who venerate it, commit idolatry," in "Condensing and Shaping the Flesh . . . : The Incarnation and the Instrumental Function of the Soul of Christ in the Iconoclastic Christology," in *Origeniana Decima*, ed. S. Kaczmarek and H. Pietras (Leuven, 2011), 919–32, at 928.

any human being. But this opens up the very difficult problem of knowing what is represented in an icon of Christ. The standard answer is that Christ's human nature cannot be portrayed as a nature, but only as it occurs in the hypostasis, that is, in the person of Christ, in his individual reality. And in the hypostasis, Christ's humanity has the properties of an individual man, including a particular appearance that was seen and can be portrayed. The fact that Christ is circumscribable, and therefore representable, is proof of his humanity. If, as stated by the Council of Chalcedon, Christ is fully human, then he must be representable, just like any other man. As God, Christ cannot be circumscribed, for he is what the Father is; but as a man, he is just like

any other individual. Christ can be represented because his humanity, although it is universal, is instantiated or realized in a given individual who is characterized by a set of properties that make him unique and different from all other individuals. Theodore uses here the Aristotelian theory of universals, based on what would be called today the principle of instantiation. Here again, a discussion of the humanity of Christ is conducted through the help of philosophical theses, and constitutes a reflection on the mode of being of universals. I wish to mention two texts by Theodore, who gives an interpretation of the problem grounded in a realist understanding of universals.

Ψιλὸς μὲν οὖν ὁ Χριστὸς οὐ γέγονεν· μηδὲ γὰρ τῶν τινα ἀνθρώπων ἀναλαβεῖν φαίη ἂν τις τῶν εὐσεβούντων· τὸν δὲ καθ' ὅλου, ἥτοι τὴν ὅλην φύσιν· ἀλλὰ μὴν τὴν ἐν ἀτόμῳ θεωρουμένην· πῶς γὰρ ἂν καὶ ὥπται;<sup>33</sup>

For Christ did not become a mere man; no one among the pious would ever say that He assumed a particular man among men; rather He assumed the universal man, that is, the whole human nature. It must be said, however, that this whole human nature was considered in an individual—for otherwise how could He be seen?

For Theodore, the humanity assumed by Christ is clearly universal; he nevertheless specifies, using an expression borrowed from Leontius of Byzantium and John of Damascus, that it is a universal “considered” in one individual (τὴν ἐν ἀτόμῳ θεωρουμένην). This is the condition for Christ's humanity to be seen, and ultimately to be depicted. Depiction implies accidental characteristics—shape, size, color of hair and eyes, physical traits, etc.—and Theodore makes it clear that accidents are not considered in a universal or general essence but in the hypostasis, in an individual.<sup>34</sup>

In contrast to the Iconoclasts' conception of humanity as ideal and abstract, which forms the basis of their position that Christ cannot be represented, Theodore presents an Aristotelian realist view, based

on the presupposition that humanity only exists in subsisting individuals. Theodore can answer the question of the humanity of Christ by choosing the universalist answer because he has an adequate understanding of the mode of being of universals, a view different both from the Iconoclasts' and, as we will see, from Photius's. Theodore's argumentative strategy is based on his view on the question of the subsistence of universals. For him, universals do not exist on their own, but subsist only in individuals. This has a double theoretical role for Theodore: to ensure the reality of universals on the one hand as well as the possibility of their depiction on the other. The question of the humanity of Christ is embedded in an interrogation about the representability of his flesh:

33 Theodore the Studite, *First Refutation of the Iconoclasts* §4, PG 99:331D–333A, trans. Roth (Crestwood NY, 2001), 23, modified.

34 Theodore the Studite, *Ep.* 492. Ed. Fatouros, 2:726.12–13: συμβεβηκότα δὲ οὐκ ἐν τῇ καθόλου οὐσίᾳ, ἀλλ' ἐν τῇ ὑποστάσει τεθεώρηται.

Ἀντίθεσις ὡς ἐκ τῶν Εἰκονομάχων.

Εἰ σάρκα παραδόξως ἀνέλαβεν ὁ Χριστὸς ἐν τῇ οἰκειᾷ ὑποστάσει· ἀχαρακτήριστον δὲ ὡς τὸν τινὰ μὴ σημαίνουσαν, ἀλλὰ τὸν καθόλου ἄνθρωπον· πῶς ἄρα ἐφικτὸν ταύτην φηλαφωμένην εὐρίσκεισθαι, καὶ χρώμασι διαφόροις καταγράφεσθαι; φαῦλος ὁ λόγος, καὶ ἡ ἐπίνοια ψευδής.

Πρὸς τοῦτο λύσις.

Εἰ σάρκα παραδόξως ἀνέλαβεν ὁ Χριστὸς ἐν τῇ οἰκειᾷ ὑποστάσει· ἀχαρακτήριστον δὲ καθὼς φατε, ὡς τὸν τινὰ μὴ σημαίνουσαν, ἀλλὰ τὸν καθόλου ἄνθρωπον, πῶς ἐν αὐτῷ ὑπέστη; τὰ γὰρ καθόλου ἐν τοῖς ἀτόμοις τὴν ὑπαρξιν ἔχει· οἷον, ἡ ἀνθρωπότης ἐν Πέτρῳ καὶ Παύλῳ καὶ τοῖς λοιποῖς ὁμοειδέσι. Μὴ ὄντων δὲ τῶν καθ' ἑκάστα, ἀνήρηται ὁ καθόλου ἄνθρωπος. Οὐκ οὖν<sup>35</sup> ἐν Χριστῷ ἡ ἀνθρωπότης, εἴπερ μὴ ὡς ἐν τινὶ ἐστὶν ἐν αὐτῷ ὑφεστώσα . . .

Οἷς μὲν τὰ καθόλου ὁράται, νοῦς καὶ διάνοια· οἷς δὲ τὰ καθ' ἑκάστα, ὀφθαλμοί, οἱ τὰ αἰσθητὰ βλέποντες. Εἰ οὖν τὴν καθόλου ἡμῶν φύσιν ὁ Χριστὸς ἀνέλαβε, μὴ ἐν ἀτόμῳ θεωρουμένην, νῷ μόνῳ ἐστὶ θεωρητὸς καὶ διανοία ψηλαφητός. Ἀλλὰ . . . αἰσθητοῖς αἰσθητὰ παραβαλὼν. Αἰσθητὸς ἄρα ὁ Χριστὸς, ψηλαφητός, καὶ σωματικοῖς ὀφθαλμοῖς ὁρατός, καὶ διὰ τοῦτο περιγραπτός.<sup>36</sup>

This text is a treasure for a historian of philosophy. It contains a clear and technical Aristotelian declaration about the mode of being of universals. The statement “universals have their existence in individuals: for example, humanity in Peter and Paul and the others of the same species. If the individuals did not exist, the universal man would be eliminated” is exactly what an Alexandrian philosopher versed in Aristotelian logic would say, with perhaps the sole exception being the use of Christian names as examples. This is an exact formulation of the Aristotelian version of realism about universals: universals are real entities, but they exist

An objection as from the Iconoclasts:

“If Christ miraculously assumed flesh in His own hypostasis, but flesh without distinguishing features because it does not indicate a particular man but rather the universal man: how then is it possible for this flesh to be found tangible and to be portrayed in various colors? The argument is vain and the idea is false.”

Answer:

If Christ miraculously assumed flesh in His own hypostasis, but flesh without distinguishing features (as you say) because it does not indicate a particular man but rather the universal man: how did it subsist in Him? Universals have [their] existence in individuals: for example, humanity in Peter and Paul and the others of the same species. If the individuals did not exist, the universal man would be eliminated. Therefore humanity is not in Christ, if it does not subsist in Him as in an individual. . . .

Universals are seen with mind and thought; individuals are seen with eyes that look at perceptible things. If Christ assumed our universal nature, not considered in an individual, He can be considered only by the mind and touched only by thought. But . . . He associates perceptible things with perceptible things. So Christ is perceptible, tangible, and visible with bodily eyes; and therefore He is circumscribed.

only in individuals. They have to be instantiated, that is, realised in individuals, in order to exist. The use of the argument of suppression is also a philosophical classic. If all the individual cats disappeared, the specific universal cat would disappear too.<sup>37</sup>

Regarding the humanity of Christ, the solution of Theodore can be presented as follows. While Christ did assume universal human nature, he was a particular individual (*ton tina*), a hypostasis that made the general nature real by realizing it. The humanity of Christ is

35 I read οὐκ οὖν instead of Migne's οὐκοῦν.

36 Theodore the Studite, *Third Refutation of the Iconoclasts* 15–16, PG 99:396C–397B, trans. Roth, 82–83, modified.

37 An influential patristic formulation of this argument is offered by Maximus the Confessor, in a passage in his *Ambigua*, based on Nemesius of Emesa: “. . . all the particulars would be destroyed, and that together with them the universals would also be destroyed (since universals naturally consist of particulars),” *Ambigua* 10.42, trans. Constan, DOML 28, p. 313.

real because it subsists individually and visibly in the hypostasis of Christ, who has the hypostatic characteristics that distinguish him from other humans. Fundamentally, it is a theory of the mode of being of universal entities which enables Theodore's solution. Behind his explanation of incarnation lies a specific logical and ontological claim; for incarnation is understood as the realization or instantiation of the universal humanity by a given individual. For Christ to be a man requires nothing less than for him to have the universal humanity subsist in him as an individual. The ontology here intersects also with Theodore's theological beliefs precisely with respect to the centrality of hypostasis. It is the hypostasis which realizes the universal, but it is also precisely the hypostasis which is venerated in the

icon, as stated by the Seventh Ecumenical Council in 787: "The one who venerates the icon venerates the hypostasis of the person depicted on it (ὁ προσκυνῶν τὴν εἰκόνα προσκυνεῖ ἐν αὐτῇ τοῦ ἐγγραφομένου τὴν ὑπόστασιν)."<sup>38</sup>

## Photius

One of the most important representatives of the revival of studies that took place in ninth-century Byzantium during the so-called first Byzantine Renaissance, Photius,<sup>39</sup> who was twice patriarch of Constantinople, wrote a short work on the question of the universality of Christ's assumed humanity (*Amphilochia* 231).<sup>40</sup> Here is Photius's formulation of the question:

Πότερον ὁ Χριστὸς τὸν καθόλου ἄνθρωπον ἀνελάβετο ἢ τὸν ἐπὶ μέρους;

Φαμέν οὔτε τὸν καθόλου οὔτε τὸν ἐπὶ μέρους· οὐδὲ γὰρ ἐξ ἀνάγκης θάτερον τούτων ὑπάρχειν δεῖ· οὐ γὰρ κατὰ ἀντίφασιν ἢ ἐρώτησις.<sup>41</sup>

Did Christ assume the universal man or a particular man?

We state that He assumed neither the universal man nor a particular man. It is not necessary that it be the one or the other, since the question does not imply a contradiction.

Photius rejects both the universalist and the particularist options. The humanity assumed by Christ is not universal as, according to Photius's understanding of what is meant by universal, this would have the unfortunate consequence of making Christ not a real man but just an empty mental thought, lacking any reality. This is especially interesting because it shows

that it is the philosophy, in this case a pointed understanding of what a universal is, that determines the solution to the theological question. The particularist solution is easier to reject, as it is reduced to a heretical position.

Here are Photius's logically constructed arguments against the universalist solution:

εἰ μὲν γὰρ τὸν καθόλου ἄνθρωπον ἀνελάβετο ὁ Χριστός, συμβαίνει αὐτὸν μὴ καθ' ὑπαρξιν μηδ' ἐν αἰσθήσει γενέσθαι ἄνθρωπον, ἀλλ' ἐπινοία μόνη καὶ φαντασία, αὕτη γὰρ ἢ τοῦ καθόλου ὑπαρξίς.

If Christ had assumed the universal man, the result would be that He would not be a man in existence nor in a sensible way, but in thought alone and in imagination, for such is the existence of the universal.

38 Mansi 13:377E; ed. Lamberz, *Acta conciliorum oecumenicorum: Concilium Universale Nicaenum Secundum*, pt. 3, *Concilii Actiones VI–VI* (Berlin, 2016), 828.16–18.

39 For a recent account of Photius's life, education, and work see J. Schamp, "Photios," in *Dictionnaire des philosophes antiques*, vol. 5, part 1, ed. R. Goulet (Paris, 2012), 585–610.

40 V. Baranov offers a very good reading of this text in juxtaposition with Second Iconoclasm in "Amphilochia 231 of Patriarch Photius as a Possible Source on the Christology of the Byzantine Iconoclasts," *StP* 68 (2013): 371–79. See also the analysis of G. Kapriev, *Philosophie in Byzanz* (Würzburg, 2005), 192–94.

41 Photius, *Amphilochia* 231, in *Photii Patriarchae Constantinopolitani Epistulae et Amphilochia*, ed. L. G. Westerink, vol. 6, fasc. 1. (Leipzig, 1987), 14.1–3.



ἔτι δὲ καὶ εἰ τὸν καθόλου ἄνθρωπον ἀνελάβετο ὁ Χριστός, τὸ δὲ καθόλου τοῦτο ἐστίν, τὸ ἐν πολλαῖς ὑποστάσεσι θεωρούμενον, ἔσται ὁ Χριστός, ἐπεὶ τὸν καθόλου ἀνείληφεν ἄνθρωπον, ὑποστάσεις πολλαί, μᾶλλον δὲ ἄπειροι. Συμβαίνει δὲ καὶ μὴ εἶναι ἡμῖν αὐτὸν ὁμοούσιον· ἀναληφθέντος γὰρ τοῦ καθόλου ἀνθρώπου ἐν τῷ θεῷ λόγῳ οὐκέτι ἡμεῖς ἄνθρωποι λεχθείμεν· πόθεν γὰρ τοῦτο ὑπάρξει ἡμῖν, καὶ κατὰ τί κοινωνήσομεν τῷ Χριστῷ;

πρὸς δ' αὐτοῖς εἰρημένοις καὶ ἕτερον ὑπάρξει ἀτόπημα, τὸ τῶν ἀνθρώπων ἕκαστον καὶ ἄνθρωπον εἶναι καὶ μὴ ἄνθρωπον· ἕκαστος γὰρ ἡμῶν κατὰ τὸν ἀληθῆ λόγον ἄνθρωπός ἐστί τε καὶ ὀνομάζεται· τοῦ δὲ καθόλου, καθ' ὃ πάντες ἄνθρωποι εἶναι ἐλέγοντο, παρὰ τοῦ θεοῦ λόγου ἀναληφθέντος, πῶς ἐσόμεθα ἄνθρωποι;

διὰ οὖν ταῦτα πάντα καὶ ἕτερα πλείονα οὐ λέγομεν ἀνείληφέναι τὸν Χριστὸν τὸν καθόλου ἄνθρωπον.<sup>42</sup>

Moreover, if Christ had assumed the universal man, and since a universal is what can be considered in a multitude of individuals, then Christ, supposing he had assumed the universal man, would be a multitude of individuals or, rather, an infinite number of individuals. From this would result that He would not be of the same essence as us: since the universal man would have been part of God the Word, we would not be called *men*. For from where would this come about for us, and in what way would we have something common with Christ?

In addition to the aforementioned impossibilities, there is another: each man would both be and not be a man: according to the correct doctrine, each of us is a man and is called such; but since the universal, according to which all men are said to be “men,” would have been included in God the Word, how could we be men?

For all these reasons and also for others, we say that Christ did not assume the universal man.

The first argument is classic. If Christ assumed universal humanity, and as universals have conceptual being only, incarnation would not be real, nor—and this is an interesting addition—manifest in the sensible world.

The second argument, by mentioning circumscribability (περιγραφόμενον, περιγράφεται), contains a clear reference to the Iconoclastic debate, in which this term is central. The issue of the spatial location of universals can indeed be understood without it, but the language of περιγραφή used here clearly points toward the Iconoclastic controversy. The argument runs as follows: if Christ assumed universal humanity, and as a universal is not spatially delimited, Christ as man would not be spatially delimited either. An additional consequence is indeed that in that case, he could not be depicted.

The third argument is traditional too. As a universal is a set of individuals, assuming a universal means assuming a set of individuals, which is impossible.

We can learn from this extremely rich text several interesting points not about Photius's Christology, but about his ontology. *Amphilochia* 231, whose scope is theological, thus turns out to be a rich source of information on Photius's conception of universals. This text is particularly useful for this, especially since another

statement of his on universals, *Amphilochia* 77, offers an answer that is both condensed and underdeveloped,<sup>43</sup> except for its clear condemnation of Platonic ideas. In *Amphilochia* 231, Photius is wary of any sort of realist interpretation of universals. In contrast, he states two central points of particularist thought: first the merely conceptual, and thus intramental, existence of universal entities; and second the fact that what corresponds in reality to a universal name is a set of individuals and not a unique property, as Photius chooses an extensive and not an intensive understanding of universals. The presence of technical vocabulary drawn from Porphyry highlights Photius's use of philosophical tools in order to solve the question.

When he argues for his rejection of universal humanity in Christ, Photius mentions four characteristics of universals:

43 Ed. Westerink, 100:178–84: σωματικά μὲν ἐστὶ τὰ γένη καὶ εἶδη τῶν σωμάτων, οὐ σώματα δέ, καὶ δηλωτικὰ τῶν ὑποκειμένων, οὐ δηλούμενα δέ, καὶ ἀναπτύσσοντα τὴν ὑπαρξίν τούτων, οὐχ ὑφίσταντα δέ, καὶ τῶν ἐν αὐτοῖς μερῶν τὴν οὐσίωσιν ἀπαγγέλλοντα, οὐ παρέχοντα δέ, καὶ ὀνόματα καταλλήλοις νοήμασι καὶ οἰκείοις τῶν ὑποκειμένων τὰς ὑποστάσεις σημαίνοντα, οὐ τοῖς οὐσι καὶ αὐταρκεστάτοις ὧν μὴ δέωνται ταῦτα δι' ἑαυτῶν παρεχόμενα.

42 Ibid., 14.3–15.20.

1. Universals are conceptual and not real.
2. Universals are not circumscribed locally.
3. Universals can be observed in a multitude of individuals.
4. Belonging to a species is expressed by the predication of the universal.

In this passage, we find what is probably the clearest statement of Photius on the mode of being of universals:

ἐπινοία μόνη καὶ φαντασία αὕτη γὰρ ἡ τοῦ  
καθόλου ὑπαρξίς

in thought alone and in imagination—such is  
the existence of the universal

Universality is only conceptual. Universals are not real entities, but thoughts. The expression ἐπινοία μόνη obviously refers to Porphyry's first question at the beginning of the *Isagoge* on the status of universals. The vocabulary

is technical; what is discussed here is indeed the issue of the mode of existence of the universal as such.<sup>44</sup>

In consequence, when we read in Photius's statement on universals in *Amphilochia* 77 that genera and species "are names signifying the entities of that which is placed under them" (ὀνόματα . . . τῶν ὑποκειμένων τὰς ὑποστάσεις σημαίνοντα), we should take it seriously. The same idea appears again in our text. Universals as universals exist only in the mind. Universality is a property of words and concepts, not of things.

Despite his rejection of the extramental reality of universals, however, Photius accepts that they are grounded in individuals. From an ontological point of view, a universal is just the set of individuals that belongs to a given species or genus. This conception allows Photius to state in this text that endorsing a universal means endorsing a potentially unlimited number of individuals.

Here is the end of the *pars destruens* of Photius's reasoning, the rejection of the solution of a particular humanity:<sup>45</sup>

Ἀλλ' οὐδὲ τὸν ἐπὶ μέρους ἄνθρωπον δίκαιον ἂν εἶη λέγειν τὸν Χριστὸν ἀνειληφέναι· εἰ γὰρ τοῦτο δοθείη, οὐ μία ἔσται ὁ Χριστὸς ὑπόστασις, ἀλλὰ δύο· τότε γὰρ ἀναλαβεῖν ἐλέγετο ὁ Χριστὸς τὸν ἐν μέρει ἄνθρωπον, εἴ γε τὴν φύσιν μετὰ τῶν ιδιωμάτων ἀνέλαβεν, αὕτη δὲ οὐδὲν ἕτερόν ἐστιν ἢ ὑπόστασις.<sup>46</sup>

This does not mean that it would be correct to say that Christ assumed a particular man. If we were to accept this, then Christ would not be a single hypostasis, but two. For Christ would be said to have assumed a particular man if indeed He had assumed the nature with proper features, which is nothing other than the hypostasis.

The argument is simple. If Christ assumed a particular humanity, this humanity would have had to be particularized by a set of properties, as this is the only way for humanity to be particularized. But this set of properties would constitute an individual other than

Christ. Assuming a particular humanity is equivalent to assuming humanity plus a set of particular properties, and this is nothing other than assuming another individual and so, *in fine*, being two individuals.

And finally, here is Photius's own solution:

44 Photius may also have been influenced by the formulation of Gregory of Nazianzus, who says in *Oration* 31, *De spiritu sancto* §15 (ed. P. Gallay, SC 250 [Paris, 1978], 304) that the human community (κοινότης, i.e., the universal) possesses a unity—and consequently a reality—that can be conceived only by thought (τὸ ἐν ἔχει μόνον ἐπινοία θεωρητόν).

45 The expression used here by Photius (τὸν ἐπὶ μέρους ἄνθρωπον) is notable, as it is closer to the philosophical tradition than to patristic language. Cf. Philoponus, for example, who in his commentaries to both the *First* and the *Second Analytics* uses systematically ἐπὶ μέρους in contradistinction to καθόλου.

46 Photius, *Amphilochia* 231, ed. Westerink, 15.21–25.

Τί οὖν ἀνελάβετο ὁ Χριστός, ἐρεῖ τις, εἴπερ οὔτε τὸν καθόλου ἄνθρωπον οὔτε τὸν ἐν μέρει ἀνείληφεν; λέγομεν ὅτι ἀνελάβετο μὲν τὴν ἀνθρωπείαν φύσιν, ἐξ ἑαυτοῦ δὲ ὁ λόγος παρέσχε τὰ ἰδιώματα, καὶ οὕτως οὐδεμία ἀτοπία παρακολουθήσει.<sup>47</sup>

So, what did Christ assume, someone may ask, if he assumed neither the universal man nor a particular man? We say that he assumed human nature, but that the Word has its proper features from himself; thus, no impossibility will follow.

Photius's own ontology—that is, his understanding of universals as mental objects and sets of individuals—makes it impossible for him to admit that the humanity assumed by Christ is universal. It could not be particular, and indeed both for logical and theological reasons. So Photius introduces a third solution: the humanity is particularized by the Word. It is not particular before Christ assumes it—as this would imply that it has been previously particularized by someone else—but neither is it universal in Christ, for the various reasons previously mentioned. Christ, by the addition of his own set of properties, makes humanity particular. With this solution, Photius has no need to contradict his ontological conviction that only individuals exist in sensible reality and that universals have their being in mind only.

### Theodore and Photius

Both Theodore and Photius reject the thesis that the humanity assumed by Christ is particular, for both ontological and theological reasons. On the level of ontology, for both thinkers such an understanding of Christ's humanity is equivalent to Christ's assuming another individual. This solution is considered by both to be heretical, namely to be tantamount to Nestorianism. For both Theodore and Photius, Christ has his proper features (τὰ ἰδιώματα) from himself. For Theodore the assumed humanity of Christ is universal (but considered in one individual). For Photius, it is neither universal nor particular. For both, their answer is determined by their conception of the status of universals. Both Theodore's and Photius's solutions are articulated through a statement on the mode of being of universals, on their ὑπαρξίς.

For Theodore it is:

τὰ [. . .] καθόλου ἐν τοῖς ἀτόμοις τὴν ὑπαρξίν ἔχει

Universals have their existence in individuals.

For Photius it is:

ἐπινοία μόνῃ καὶ φαντασίᾳ αὕτη [. . .] ἢ τοῦ καθόλου ὑπαρξίς

in thought alone and in imagination, such is the existence of the universal

Both theories are Aristotelian, but depend on different parts of the *Corpus Aristotelicum*. Theodore's solution reflects the traditional exegesis of the *Categories*. Photius's claim in turn can be related to the position extrapolated from the *De anima* and often associated with Aristotle, according to which universals have conceptual being only. Neither position leans toward Platonic realism. Both, indeed, accept that individuals are real and give them ontological priority.

The main difference pertains to instantiation. According to Theodore, universals really exist in individuals. While they have no existence outside individuals, they are real in them. According to Theodore, universals have their existence in individuals; according to Photius, while universals may be observed in individuals, they are never said to exist in them. It is easy to see why the solution of the universality of the humanity of Christ was not acceptable to Photius. As universal humanity, it has no reality and cannot cause or explain the humanity of a particular man. In *Amphilochia* 77, Photius insists on universals' lack of causal power: secondary substances, and more generally universals, do not have causal or constitutive power. I believe this thesis to be present here also. As Aristotle declares in *De anima* 402b7, the universal is posterior (ὑστερον); it cannot explain ontologically the being of an individual. If it depended on a universal, the humanity of Christ would be as mind-dependent as the universal is.

47 Ibid., 15.26–29.

In contrast, Theodore relies on a more realist theory of universals. This makes it acceptable for him that the humanity of Christ is universal, for it is then taken to exist according to a definite mode of being and to be subject to the necessity of being instantiated. It is no less real for being universal; not because it has separate existence, but because it is instantiated. Thus the humanity of Christ is concrete. This allows Theodore to respond to the Iconoclast argument. Whereas Iconoclasts defend a conception of universals as ideal and abstract, he responds with an Aristotelian conception of instantiation that makes the universal concrete. As realized in an individual, a universal is real and non-fictional in nature and is adequate to explain metaphysically the humanity of the individual.

Another strong conceptual difference stems from the description of universals as mental objects. Photius states that the universal exists ἐπινοία μόνῃ καὶ φαντασίᾳ, “in thought alone and in imagination.” The presence of imagination as the faculty involved in representing the universal lends the theory a strongly Aristotelian coloring.<sup>48</sup> Photius’s exact source is difficult to trace, given the very limited amount of contextualization in this *Amphilochia*; nevertheless it shows almost certainly that Photius was familiar with a summary of the content, if not the text itself or a commentary upon it, of the *De anima*. Theodore, on the other hand, states that universals are seen with mind and thought (νοῦς καὶ διάνοια), as opposed to individuals that are seen with eyes that look at perceptible things. The problem here is that of distinguishing sensory perception from intellection. I do not see the universal, but I consider it with my mind.

48 As well noted by D. Modrak, “*Phantasia* is essential to the cognition of universals because the mind needs to have immediate access to sensible particulars exemplifying universals in order to realize the universal as an object of thought. Thinking proper is about universals not particulars. Perception proper is about particulars. *Phantasia* enables the thinker to bring materials from perception to bear on the apprehension of universals that are exemplified by sensible particulars. In order to explain complex behaviors without appealing to rationality, Aristotle develops a notion of representation through sensory contents. This allows him to invoke either *phantasia* or perception as the vehicle for the complex cognitive activities that are required for seemingly intelligent behavior or are required to ground abstract cognitive activities in the world of concrete objects.” See “Aristotle on *Phantasia*,” in *The Routledge Handbook of Philosophy of Imagination*, ed. A. Kind (London, 2016), 15–26, at 21.

## Conclusion

Two points are striking after considering this set of middle Byzantine texts on the humanity of Christ. The most obvious is the existence of a tradition. The debate seems codified, with a fixed number of available arguments and also a recurring vocabulary. The terminological proximity is obvious between Leontius of Byzantium, John of Damascus, and Theodore the Studite. Even if Photius seems more original in his treatment of the question, some of the arguments he uses are also traditional. This indeed demonstrates the potential interest for modern scholars of considering this set of texts not isolated from one other, but as participating in an ongoing debate. What changes is the motivation of tackling the problem, from a purely Christological perspective (Leontius, John) to the perspectives occasioned by the crisis of Iconoclasm, which are indeed still deeply Christological but which are also determined by the question of the representability of Christ (Theodore, and subsequently Photius).

Once again it is interesting to observe the theoretical shift between John of Damascus and Theodore the Studite, even if both are struggling against Iconoclasm. John of Damascus, who was perfectly aware of this conceptual tool—indeed he wrote the *Dialectica*—did not use Aristotelian logic to strengthen his position, precisely as he did not face the problem of the universality of the humanity of Christ within the context of his theory of images. The debate during the second period of Iconoclasm is definitely of a different nature, with a different methodology and different arguments.

The second point is the similarity in the structure of the three answers: in all cases—even if it is more manifest in Theodore and Photius because they both formulate clear statements about it—the theological problem is solved by referring to a philosophical theory of the mode of being of universals. The link between the two points is obvious and it demonstrates well that a historian of philosophy in search of evidence about middle Byzantine theories of universals must consider the debate on the humanity of Christ, as well as the discussion of secondary substances in the exegetical tradition of Aristotle’s *Categories* or the discussions generated in the aftermath of Porphyry’s *Isagoge*. Treating



the question of the humanity of Christ through only rational arguments and the technical character of the positions in question renders the theological tradition fertile for philosophical and logical inquiry. A study of it is necessary in order to construct an accurate and comprehensive representation of logical-ontological debates in Byzantium.

University of Vienna  
Institute for Byzantine and  
Modern Greek Studies  
Postgasse 7/1/3  
1010 Vienna, Austria  
christophe.erismann@univie.ac.at

✂ THIS ARTICLE WAS WRITTEN UNDER THE auspices of the research project “Reassessing Ninth Century Philosophy: A Synchronic Approach to the Logical Traditions” (9 SALT), generously granted by the European Research Council (CoG 648298). It has greatly benefited from research conducted during a fellowship at Dumbarton Oaks. Previous versions of this paper were presented at various research seminars at DO and at the universities of Bucharest, Vienna, and Berlin (FU). I would like to thank,

respectively, Margaret Mullett, Adrian Lemeni, Uta Heil, and Gyburg Uhlmann for their kind invitation and comments after the talk. I would like to thank Byron MacDougall for his careful reading of this article. I am also especially indebted to the two anonymous reviewers of *DOP*, and to Joel Kalvesmaki and David Weeks for their very useful comments. My deep gratitude goes to Michael Maas for the many highly enjoyable and thought-provoking discussions that we had on this subject and related topics.